



CONTACTS

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helpfile@computershopper.co.uk
for all PC problems

softwarehelp@computershopper.co.uk
for help with software applications

buyinghelp@computershopper.co.uk
for advice on PC purchases

businesshelp@computershopper.co.uk
for IT solutions to business goals

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HELPFILE

AVG licensing error

Q I used to have Windows 98 on my computer, but I recently upgraded to Windows XP Professional Edition. The problem is that my AVG Free Edition anti-virus program is now saying there is a licensing error.

I have tried to uninstall the program and reinstall it, but I cannot delete the file. I bought *Computer Shopper* May 2007 with Kaspersky Internet Security on the cover disc, but the computer won't let me install this either because AVG is still there. What should I do?

R Ashmore

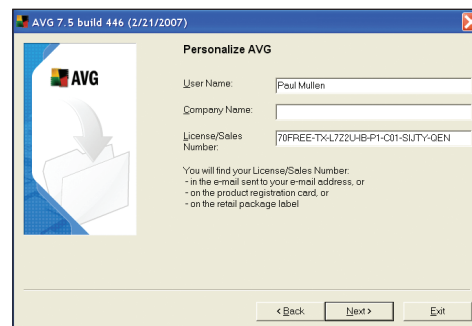
A Quite a few people see this licence error message every time they start their computer. When you get it, you can't reinstall or remove AVG Free Edition, as you have discovered. We were unable to mess up our AVG installation sufficiently to test the problem, but I'm told that the trick to fixing it is to download the latest version of AVG Free Edition and proceed to install it.

Choose Add or Remove Components and click Next, and you'll see a screen that asks for your name, company and licence code. This appears before you get the message demanding that you remove the old version first. This screen will already have a licence code filled in. Copy that licence code and paste it into Notepad. Save it as a text file on your desktop.

Restart the computer. When you get the licence error message, click Activate. Open the text file you

created containing the licence key and copy that licence code to the licence field. Fill in your name (the company field should be blank, as AVG Free Edition is for personal use only) and then click OK. Once you have entered the key, you can remove the old installation of AVG and install the latest version of Kaspersky.

Kaspersky needs lots of memory to run efficiently and we do not recommend installing it unless you have at least 512MB of RAM. Kaspersky is also more efficient if your hard disks use the NTFS file system. It uses the NTFS alternate file streams feature to save a signature of each checked file so it can scan program files quickly each time they are run.



▲ In the screen that asks for your name, company and licence code, save the code you see as a text file

Vista reports hard disk as faulty

Q I've just updated my Windows XP PC to Windows Vista. All was going well with the full, clean installation until I came to choose which drive to load Vista on to. My C: drive had a yellow warning triangle next to it and I was informed that my hard disk was about to fail.

Thinking this could be a glitch, I chose to install Vista anyway. A few hours later, Vista informed me that the disk was failing and that I should back up my data. This message appeared several times over the next couple of hours and eventually I was given an option to disable it, which I did.

The hard disk was brand new in December 2006 and I had no problems with Windows XP, apart from a slow transfer rate a few times when I backed up large quantities of data to my 500GB external disk. Is this just a software glitch, or should I send back the disk?

Chris Amies, chrisamies@gmail.com

A Windows Vista includes some new diagnostic features, one of which is called Windows Disk Diagnostics. Microsoft says that this will watch for early signs of disk failure and give a warning. Unfortunately, it doesn't say how it does this, but it turns out the utility is simply looking at a feature most hard disks have been using for the

past few years called Self-Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting Technology, or SMART for short.

A SMART drive monitors itself for signs of impending disk failure. If the disk starts to get lots of CRC errors, or has to make an unusually high number of attempts to read data, or even if the drive starts to overheat, this system may warn of impending failure. In about 50 per cent of cases, a disk fails without any early warning. In a few cases, the SMART system starts giving warnings long before actual failure occurs. If the disk is under warranty, manufacturers will replace any disk that gives a SMART warning.

Windows Vista checks the drive's SMART status once an hour and records any problems in the Event log. If you check the log files using Event Viewer, you can see why it gives that warning. Most motherboards have an option to check the drive's SMART status at bootup, although usually this is turned off by default. We always make a point to turn it on. We suggest you go into your motherboard BIOS setup and enable this option. If the motherboard gives the same warning, we'd suggest replacing that disk before it fails. If you don't care about any data stored on it, you could just keep using it until your computer crashes and won't restart. Another alternative is to test the disk with the manufacturer's diagnostic program. You should be able to find this on its website.



Missing OE files

Q I use Outlook Express 6 and save my emails in a range of folders such as Holiday, Permanent and so on. There are 23 folders in all. Suddenly, the saved emails have disappeared from folders 13 to 23. However, if I use Google Desktop's search the emails still appear there. The .dbx files also show up to several megabytes for each of the missing files, so they must be somewhere. I tried saving them and reimporting them, but they still don't show up in Outlook Express. Folders 1 to 12 show all the files that should be there. Can you help me find them?

Alex Bennett, alex@bennett1962.fsnet.co.uk

A Unfortunately, Outlook Express (OE) is not very good at dealing with large quantities of saved mail. If you have too many messages in one folder, or sometimes too many folders, it is prone to data corruption and then can't find messages. For this reason, we recommend trying to limit the size of each OE folder to under 2MB. When folders get that large, OE can easily corrupt them. For speedy access, it is also a good idea to keep frequently used folders below around 400KB.

You are correct in assuming that your email is still in the folders. OE stores each folder in a .dbx file, which contains the messages and indexing information. That indexing information must have become corrupt. Most applications that store information in some kind of database, including Quicken and QuickBooks, include a re-index function that rebuilds a corrupted index. Sadly, OE does not, so we have to use roundabout methods to recover mail from damaged folders.

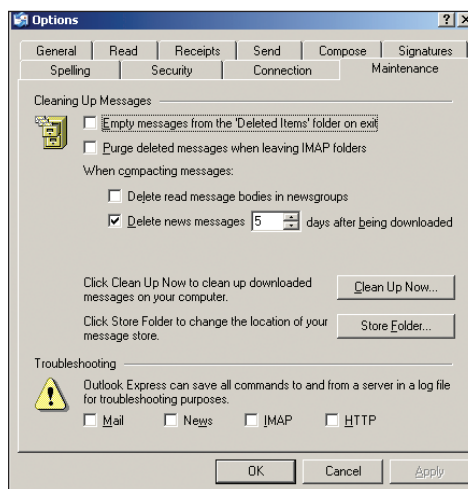
Before you do anything else, make a backup of the folders in which OE stores mail. Even this is much harder than it should be as it stores its mail in a hidden folder. The easiest way to find where the mail is stored is to click on the Tools menu, choose Options, Maintenance and then click the Store Folder button. You will see that the messages are stored in a folder with a very long pathname.

You can highlight that path and press Ctrl-C to copy it to the clipboard. Then click Start, Run and press Ctrl-V to paste that path into the Run command window. Click OK and an Explorer window should open containing the message folder files. You can then copy them to a backup folder. Another, much simpler way to back up your mail folder files is to download David Guess's free OE Quick backup program from www.oehelp.com/oebackup.

REPAIR THE DAMAGE

Once you have made a backup, you can start trying to repair the damage. The simplest problem to fix is a corrupted folders.dbx file, which is where OE stores the list of folders. Sometimes this gets corrupted, which usually results in folders not being seen at all, rather than being empty. Follow the above procedure to open an Explorer window with the message folders. Then exit from the OE program. In Windows Explorer, make sure you have selected the option to show file extensions. This option is available from the Tools menu, Folder Options, View tab. Untick 'Hide extensions for known file types' and click OK.

Rename the folders.dbx file to folders.old. Restart OE and a new folders.dbx file will be created. Hopefully all your folders will appear properly. If you use OE to view newsgroups, your newsgroups data may be lost. Subfolders may also be moved to a different position so you may need to edit message-filtering rules.



▲ In Outlook Express, compaction frees up unused space left by deleted messages

If this does not solve the problem, there is another quick fix to try, which will either fix the problem or completely destroy the missing messages. On the Outlook Express File menu, choose Folders, then Compact All Folders. Compaction frees up unused space left by deleted messages. Hopefully, OE will figure out that the index is corrupted and will correct it, but often it can ignore the missing messages and compact an empty file.

If compaction does not work, exit OE and restore your backup copy of the folders. The only remaining way to get those messages back is to run a recovery utility that will extract anything that appears to be messages from the corrupted .dbx file and will store each message in a separate EML file. There are several utilities that do this, and some work better on certain corrupted files than others.

RECOVERY TOOLS

Some recovery tools can be extremely slow, or will crash or hang when encountering a corrupted .dbx file. For this reason, you may have to try several utilities to find out which works for your corrupted files. Fortunately, most are either free or have trial versions. Look at Macallan's free utility called OE Extraction, available from <http://macallan.club.fr>, and then try either Recovery Toolbox for Outlook Express (\$27, around £13) from www.recoverytoolbox.com or Mail Navigator's DBX Backup from www.mailnavigator.com/outlook-express-dbx-backup.html (\$29, around £14). DBX Backup can recover corrupted OE folders too, despite its name.

There is an old utility called dbXtract (\$7, around £3.50) which is available from www.oehelp.com/DBXtract, but this is very slow and can take hours to run on a large .dbx file, often failing on corrupted files. It has largely been replaced by another program by the same author. DBExpress (\$25, around £12), which is available from www.oehelp.com/DBXpress.

All these programs will, if they work properly, create a folder containing many EML files. Each file will contain one message, although some will be incomplete fragments, some will be duplicated and some will be messages that were deleted long ago. To re-create the original folder, run OE, delete the corrupted folders and create new empty folders with the same names. Then switch to Windows Explorer, view the folder containing the EML files and use Ctrl-A to select them all. You can then drag the selected messages to the Outlook Express window and drop them on to the appropriate folder. OE will import the messages to that folder.

Your experts

HELPFILE

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Paul Mullen

With 27 years of PC experience as a power user, programmer and IT consultant, Paul Mullen answers all PC problems, tackling hardware, system and security issues.



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SOFTWARE HELP

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Please contact the relevant department at the email address listed above. You can also write to us at:

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Please try to give full details of your problem. We need an email address or daytime and evening telephone numbers in case we need more information.

Although the policy of Computer Shopper is not to publish readers' email addresses, we include them in Help so that other readers with experience of similar problems can share their solution (please also cc any comments to the relevant Help department above). If you would prefer not to have your email address published, please say so. ➔

Word 2002 keeps showing EULA

Q We have Microsoft Word 2002 installed as part of Works Suite 2002. Recently, we have encountered a problem. Every time we start it, it insists we accept the End User Licence Agreement. After that, everything works fine. If we don't accept it the software shuts down. I've uninstalled and then reinstalled it, but it's just the same. Is this a known bug, and do you know how to fix it?

*Dave Salmon,
dave.salmon@thecreditmanagers.co.uk*

A This problem suggests that there is some corruption in the Registry or that somehow Registry permissions have been altered. If the current user does not have sufficient access to the Registry for it to record your acceptance to the End User Licence Agreement (EULA) in the Registry, it keeps on asking the question again and again.

If the Registry is corrupted, or if permissions have been altered so that the current user does not even have read access to the relevant entries, that would account for the warning

suddenly starting to appear. As uninstalling Word does not remove all the Registry entries, the problem remains even after uninstalling and reinstalling. The solution depends on the exact cause and which version of Windows you are using. Microsoft talks about the problem, but gives only one of a number of possible causes, in its Knowledge Base article 884202 at <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/884202>.

If you are logged in as a Limited user in Windows XP, or as any user type other than Administrator in Windows 2000 Professional or Vista, then try logging in as an Administrator and running Word. Perhaps then it will write to the Registry.

If this started recently and you are using Windows XP, try running Windows Restore. You'll find it under Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools. Revert to a date before the problem started occurring.

If you can't do this, or if it didn't help, you will need to edit the Registry. Click on Start, Run and type regedit to open the Registry editor. The relevant key for Office 2002 can be found by clicking on the plus signs to expand these keys:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Office\10.0. If you use Office 2000, the key will be stored in Office\9.0. With Office 2003 the key is in Office\11.0 and with Office 2007 it is in Office\12.0. The simplest solution, which should fix a permission or corruption problem, is to uninstall Word first, then edit the Registry and delete that entire key. If the key can't be deleted, try changing permissions as described below. Once the key has been removed, reinstall Works entirely and the keys should be re-created.

A faster but less reliable approach (since it does not help if you have corrupted Registry entries) is to change permissions on that key and all the keys beneath it. Highlight and then right-click on the key called 10.0 and choose Permissions. In the window that opens, you need to click on the Advanced button, which brings up the Advanced Permissions window. In this window, select the 'Replace permission entries on all Child objects' box. Then select the permissions for Users and click on Edit. In the next window, you will need to click on Full Control then click OK. Repeat the process for other groups.

Can I upgrade my notebook's graphics?

Q I have read various articles that say you cannot upgrade the graphics processor in a notebook. I would like to know if this is true of my notebook, which is a Packard Bell Easynote L4014. Apparently, it uses a version of the Intel 915GM chipset with integrated Intel graphics, but also uses PCI-Express technology. Is this really true?

I had a look on the Packard Bell user forum site, which directed me to a site containing a list of graphics processors that are available for notebooks. It tells me that I have to make sure the notebook is MXM-compatible.

Please could you tell me what MXM technology is? And could I really disassemble this particular model, add a more powerful graphics processor and disable the onboard graphics in the BIOS?

*Daniel Johnson,
johnson.dantheman@hotmail.co.uk*

A Most notebooks use an integrated graphics controller, although a few – usually the larger and heavier desktop replacements – have provision for a separate graphics card. The integrated graphics controller still has to communicate with the processor, and many recent chips use PCI Express technology, which means that the signals sent from the processor to the graphics processor are compatible with PCI Express standards. But this doesn't mean that they have a PCI Express graphics slot: it wouldn't fit.

Just as some desktop motherboards with integrated graphics also have a slot for a graphics card, so do a few notebooks. A good example is the Dell Inspiron 9000, which comes with built-in Intel 915GM graphics but optionally can be supplied with an ATI Radeon card.

Unlike desktop computers, where there is a single PCI Express standard for graphics card slots, there are two for notebooks. Nvidia and ATI have each developed their own specifications

for notebook graphics cards. Nvidia calls its version MXM, which stands for Mobile PCI Express Module, while ATI calls its version AXIOM. Each has several types, with different size and heat-dissipation requirements.

Even then, they are not really standards. No notebook computer maker will guarantee compatibility with any card except those it supplies. Most won't even say if their computers have an AXIOM or MXM slot. Some computer makers (including Toshiba) also have their own non-standard slots for graphics processors, or else have modified their system BIOSes to accept only the MXM cards they supply.

To try to reduce confusion, as well as sell MXM cards, the website at www.mxm-upgrade.com lists notebooks known to have MXM slots. The only Packard Bell model it lists is the Easynote W7 series, which is very different from your Easynote L4 series. Nothing else that we have found indicates that the L4014 has a graphics card slot.

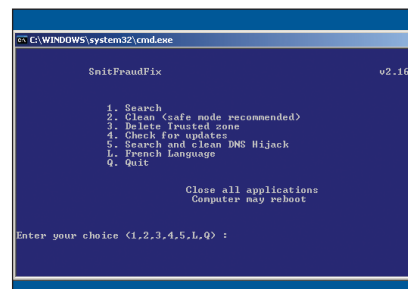
Feedback Getting rid of spyware infections

Q I read with interest the letter about internet intrusions that appeared in *Helpfile*, *Shopper* March 2007, and I noticed that SmitFraudFix was suggested as a way of getting rid of a spyware infection.

After downloading and uncompressing the utility, I found I was presented with an array of .exe files. But which of these files launches the program? I chose one that I thought looked likely, and unfortunately it crashed my computer.

Neil Richmond, nrichmond@waitrose.com

A SmitFraudFix can be downloaded from <http://siri.urz.free.fr/Fix/SmitfraudFix.exe>. When you download and run this self-extracting archive, it places files in a folder and should run a batch file that displays a menu. Select Clean (do this in Safe Mode) and it tracks down and removes elements of many SmitFraud variants. Assuming you have downloaded the correct file, you should allow the self-extractor to do its job. If you have software such as WinZip installed, it can sometimes offer to extract files to a folder and then fails to execute the correct file to get started.



▲ When you run the SmitFraudFix .exe file, it should run a batch file that displays this menu

Choosing operating system at bootup

Q I recently built a computer. I installed two hard disks, one running Windows and one running Linux. The Windows drive is set as the master and the Linux drive is set as a slave. This means that, by default, Windows will start up when I turn the computer on.

If I want Linux to load I have to go into the BIOS settings and change the boot sequence order. Is there a way to change it so it asks which operating system I want to load when the computer is turned on?

Robert Hatswell, roberthatswell@hotmail.com

A What you need is a so-called dual-boot system, which requires a small program called a boot loader. There are probably as many ways to achieve what you want as there are distributions of Linux.

The distribution of Linux you're using almost certainly came with a boot loader. It probably installed one. The most popular Linux boot loaders are called LILO and GRUB. You should be able to configure it by editing a file called `grub.conf` or `lilo.conf` so it will give you the choice of partitions from which to boot.

There are lots of webpages describing how to do it with different versions of Linux and Windows. Search for "grub how-to" or "lilo how-to" depending on which loader you have. Be careful of instructions that suggest you should install LILO or GRUB to the MBR of your Windows drive. This can work if you are careful, but if it fails you end up with neither operating system able to boot. It would be much safer to load LILO or GRUB on the slave drive and set the BIOS to boot using that drive.

THE WINDOWS BOOT LOADER

There is another, simpler way. You can use the boot loader that comes with Windows 2000 or XP. Since you have Windows on the primary hard disk, you will already have this loader installed and working; you just don't see it. So far it knows about only one of your operating systems and loads that one automatically.

While Microsoft describes how to use this loader to boot to other Microsoft systems, such as Windows 98 or MS-DOS, the Windows 2000/XP loader can be used to load almost any operating system, including Linux. Setting it up to do this is surprisingly easy. Just copy the boot sector of your Linux drive to a file, place this file in the root directory of your Windows boot drive and then edit a text file called `boot.ini`.

Start by booting to Linux and log in as root, or use the `su` command to switch your normal user login to root. Now you can make a copy of the boot sector. If your Windows installation is on a FAT32 partition, Linux can write the copy of the boot sector straight to that partition. But in most cases, Windows XP is set up with an NTFS partition. If this is true for you, you'll need to copy the boot sector to a floppy or flash drive first. For this example, we'll assume you are using a DOS-formatted floppy disk to copy the file to.

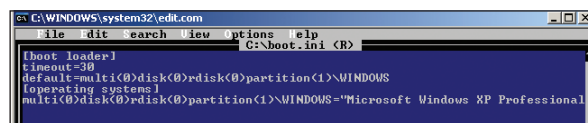
To write to a DOS floppy disk in Linux, you first have to mount it:

```
mount -t msdos /dev/fd0 /mnt/floppy
```

Now you're ready to copy the Linux boot sector to a file on the floppy. If your Linux drive is the slave on the primary IDE controller cable and its boot partition is the first partition on the drive, Linux will have called your boot partition `hdb1`. The master drive on the primary IDE channel is called `hda1`, while the master on the secondary IDE cable would be `hdc1`. Assuming your Linux installation boots from `hdb1`, use this command:

```
dd if=/dev/hdb1 bs=512 count=1 of=/mnt/floppy/linux.bin
```

This creates a file 512 bytes long called `linux.bin` on your floppy disk. You are ready to unmount the floppy and reboot back into Windows. In Windows, copy the `linux.bin` file from the floppy to the root directory of your C: drive. Click Start,



▲ If there is only one operating system listed, the loader boots straight to that system. Otherwise, it shows a text menu of choices

Run and type in `cmd` then press Enter. A command prompt window will open. In it, type:

```
cd \
attrib -r -s -h boot.ini
edit boot.ini
```

You should see something like this:

```
[boot loader]
timeout=30 default=multi(0)disk(0)
rdisk(0)partition(1)\WINDOWS
[operating systems] multi(0)disk(0)
rdisk(0)partition(1)\WINDOWS=
"Microsoft Windows XP"
```

If there is only one operating system listed, as with our example, the loader will boot straight to that system. Otherwise, it shows a text menu of choices and Timeout indicates the time in seconds for which the loader will display the list of boot options. Make sure this timeout value is greater than 0. Anywhere from 5 to 30 is suitable. After the last of these lines, add a line that reads:

```
c:\linux.bin="Linux"
```

Save the file and exit from Edit. You should change back the attributes of `boot.ini` to read only, system and hidden again with this command:

```
attrib +r +s +h boot.ini
```

If all is well, you should now get a choice on bootup of Windows or Linux.

For more information on this topic, go to www.littlewhitedog.com/content-52.html, <http://tinyurl.com/yqynr6> or <http://tinyurl.com/mrhjd>.

Windows XP virtual memory problems

Q I recently installed Windows XP Home Edition on my computer, and every so often it comes up with a message complaining about being out of memory or virtual memory being low. The computer is quite slow at this stage. Is there anything I can do to sort this out?

Paul Jolly, p-jolly@tiscali.co.uk

A You don't say how much memory your computer has and how much free disk space remains. Despite what Microsoft says, Windows XP needs a minimum of 256MB of RAM to perform reasonably well and most systems run much faster with 512MB. In addition, Windows needs enough disk space to create a paging file, also called a swap file. We suggest that this should be a minimum of 766MB.

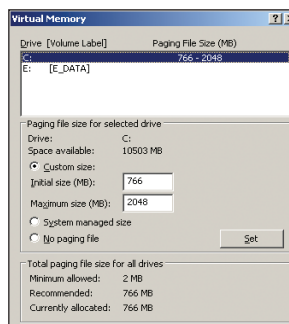
To check the memory, you need to right-click on My Computer and choose Properties. The General tab will show the processor type and usually its speed, as well as the amount of RAM. Next click on the Advanced tab and then, under Performance, click the Settings button. In the new window that opens, click the Advanced tab again and, under Virtual Memory, click Change.

As you highlight each drive letter, Windows will show you a list of all the drive partitions that are available on your computer, along with the space available on each and the current settings. At the bottom

of this window, it shows the recommended paging file size and the total space available.

If you are getting messages saying that the paging file is too small, or you have run out of virtual memory (which basically amounts to the same thing), it is either because there is too little free space on the drive containing the paging file or because someone has set a custom paging file with too small a maximum size.

If you have more than one hard disk partition, you can greatly improve performance if you create a paging file on a less-used drive letter.



▲ If you have more than one hard disk partition, create a page file on a less-used drive letter

Is my film scanner compatible with Vista?

Q I own a 1997 Pentium II Mesh PC. I added an Acer ScanWit 2720S film scanner in January 2000. This had an AEC-6710D PCI SCSI card. I plan to buy a better-specified PC such as Dell's Dimension 9200, with extra PCI slots. Will I be able to transfer the SCSI card to the new PC, and will I need to update the software to enable the scanner to work using Windows Vista?

G Lord, george.lord-limalodge@ntlworld.com

A Windows Vista requires different drivers for all peripherals and the Windows XP drivers won't work. Unfortunately, in the world of computers, seven years is a very long time, and consequently the chances of finding Windows Vista drivers for such an old device are really quite remote. It is hard enough to find Windows Vista drivers for a popular printer that was made only two years ago.

In this case, you'd need to find updates for the SCSI card driver, the scanner itself and the software supplied with it. Newer scanners tend to use USB rather than SCSI cards. To complicate matters Acer Peripherals, which made this scanner, changed its name first to Acer Communications & Multimedia then, in December 2001, to BenQ. Drivers and manuals can be found at www.benq.co.uk/support, but cover only Windows 95 through to XP and MacOS 8.6 to 9.4.

Rogue Microsoft automatic updates

Q I have downloaded and applied Microsoft automatic update number KB925902. When my computer restarted, it produced an error stating that program 'user32.dll' had been loaded into the wrong memory slot because its proper slot was occupied by program 'HHCTRLLOCX' and this meant it would not work properly.

Examination of the two files concerned shows them both to be Microsoft-written system files. I rolled back the system and the update immediately downloaded again, so I installed it and then deleted it again using the Add or Remove Programs facility as Microsoft suggests. However, the update immediately downloaded again.

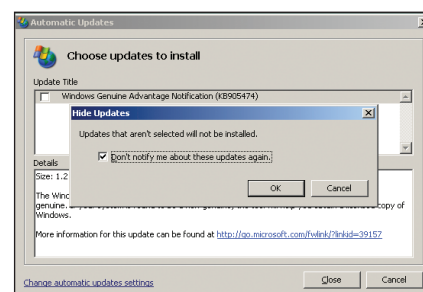
As far as I can see, my only option is to turn off automatic updates and then install and delete the update again, which makes a complete farce of the automatic update system. Can you suggest a way of retaining automatic updates while consigning this rubbish to oblivion?

Ken Ebborn, kenebbourn@waitrose.com

A This message is caused by a conflict between two Windows updates, both of which are installed when you permit automatic updates. The conflict is because the Hhctrl.locx file included in security update 928843 (part of the HTML Help ActiveX system) is incompatible with the User32.dll file, which is included in security update 925902 and is used to display standard Windows controls.

Apparently, the error occurs only if you use an application that loads Hhctrl.locx before user32.dll loads. Often the error message appears on startup in computers using the Realtek HD Audio control panel, but a few other third-party programs might cause the conflict too. Microsoft quickly fixed the problem and produced an updated version of hhctrl.locx. See <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/935448> for details. You'd be better off installing this patch rather than not loading an important security update.

Preventing a single, specific update being installed involves a cumbersome process. You first need to change your automatic update settings. Right-click on My Computer, choose Properties and then click on the Automatic



▲ The Hide Updates window allows you to tick the 'Don't notify me about these updates again' box

Updates tab. Select the 'Notify me but don't download' option. Then, when Windows notifies you that there are automatic updates waiting, click on the shield icon and choose Custom. This lists the updates to be installed, allowing you to choose which you don't want to install.

If you untick any updates, you'll see another window called Hide Updates, which allows you to tick a box called 'Don't notify me about these updates again'.

Confusion over Radeon Mobility memory

Q I recently bought a Dell Inspiron notebook running Windows Vista Business for work. It should have a 256MB ATI Mobility Radeon X1400 graphics card and 2GB of system memory installed. When I received the computer, I went into the BIOS to confirm the memory installed, but it reported 128MB. Windows also reports 128MB of dedicated video memory.

I contacted Dell's customer support (it took four phone calls and three days to get the correct telephone number) and was told that this is correct. Apparently, it is to do with the way that Windows Vista uses some of the graphics memory for system use until an application needs it for display purposes. This idea is new to me, as I thought memory sharing worked the other way around.

There was no mention of shared memory when I ordered the computer. I asked the technical support engineer to confirm that the system has 256MB of graphics memory that is separate from the 2GB of system memory, which he did. Eventually, I spoke

to the day supervisor who confirmed this statement. However, I asked, "How do I confirm that the 256MB memory is actually fitted?" He said, "You can't. We can't."

There is more to the story, but my query is simple. Is there a way to confirm that I have 256MB of video memory, or can you explain why I am wrong and what I should do next?

Neil Chapman, kanenkara@ntlworld.com

A Graphics chip manufacturers ATI and Nvidia are guilty of some deceptive marketing lately. Both have developed techniques that take advantage of PCI Express's high speed to use shared system memory to supplement the dedicated graphics memory on the card.

Nvidia has a system called TurboCache, which allows the card to access shared system memory to increase graphics memory up to four times the amount of dedicated graphics memory. ATI's system, called HyperMemory, uses system memory to double the amount of dedicated graphics memory. See <http://ati.amd.com/technology/hypermemory.html> for more

in-depth information.

When you see an ATI-based card advertised as "256MB HyperMemory", this means it has only 128MB of memory on the card. Similarly, an Nvidia card described as "256MB Turbocache" has only 64MB of memory on the card.

On the Dell webpage describing the Inspiron 9400, in the tech specs part, it lists "256MB ATI Mobility Radeon x1400 HyperMemory" as an option. There is a little superscript that directs you to a footnote at the bottom of the page. This states: "The total of local and shared system memory used by this graphics card is up to 256MB. Local onboard memory is 128MB. Up to 128MB of system memory may be allocated to support graphics, depending on system memory size and other factors."

If anyone at Dell told you your notebook has 256MB of dedicated graphics memory on this card, they were wrong. As the footnote states, it has only 128MB of memory on the card. Nevertheless, this is the card that Dell refers to as a 256MB card.

Installer asks for Sonic Activation Module

Q I have a problem with my son's Dell PC, which I bought for him a year ago. It came with a lot of free trial software, which we did not want, so I deleted it from his computer using Control Panel, Add or Remove Programs.

Now, every time he switches on, he gets a Windows installer box entitled Sonic Activation Module that says the feature is on a CD-ROM (which is not available) and asks us to insert the Sonic Activation Module disc to activate msi. We have no disk to insert and, every time we cancel the installation, a message says the installation package can't be found and the original message returns. The box cannot be closed or cancelled.

The only way I can get rid of it is to open Task Manager and cancel it that way.

Simon Richards, simonmr@tiscali.co.uk

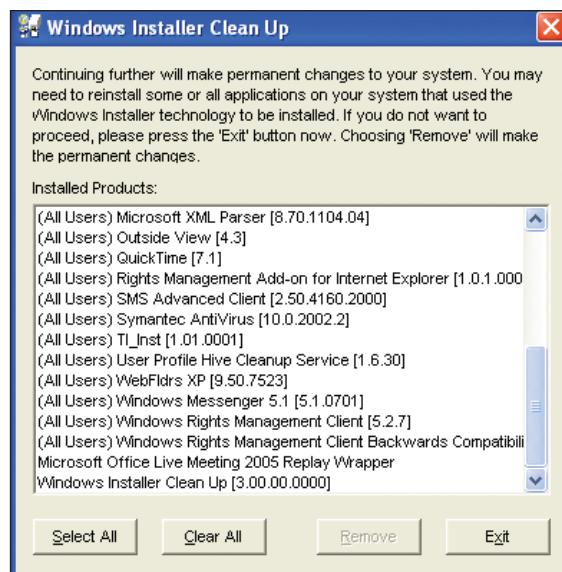
A Apparently the uninstaller for some software that came with your Dell computer did not do a very good job. There are some remnants of the installation, probably for the module that checks for updates. This in turn detects the missing components and tries to run Windows Installer to replace them.

First, check Add or Remove Programs for any mention of the Sonic Update Manager. If it is there and you have removed all Sonic software, you can safely remove this too. If you still have some Sonic software you want to keep, you can download a fix from http://tools.roxio.com/support/dell/isum_hotfix.exe.

Sonic now uses the Installshield Update Service, which is also used by other applications. If this keeps looking for software that has been removed, it may help to update to a later version, which you can download from <http://saturn.installshield.com/isus/310/sdk/installshieldupdateservice.exe>.

You can also clean up the startup programs list using msconfig. Click on Start, Run, type msconfig and click OK. In the Startup and Services tabs, you will see a list of modules that will try to run when you start your computer. At least one of these must belong to a Sonic program that you had uninstalled. In particular, I think your problem may be with modules 'isupm' and 'issch'. If you find these and untick the line for each, you should not get the error message again.

The references to MSI and Windows Installer suggest that, even though the programs have been removed, they are in the Windows Installer list of installed programs. Fortunately, Microsoft has produced a tool to clean up such troublesome remnants. See <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/290301> for details and a download link.



▲ The Windows Installer Clean Up tool shows you a list of installed applications. Remove only applications that are no longer installed

Run the Windows Installer Clean Up tool and it will show you a list of installed applications. However, you must be careful to remove only those applications that are no longer installed. Removing Installer information relating to an existing application will make it difficult or impossible to uninstall properly later. Look for Sonic applications such as MyDVD, Roxio Creator or RecordNow.

FTP blocks access to websites

Q With reference to Pete Pritchard's problem in *Helpfile, Shopper* April 2007, I have also experienced difficulties accessing a certain website. However, I don't believe it is related to any virus, spyware or fragmented packages. I often use FTP to update files to a website that I developed for a friend. Quite often, I suddenly find I cannot access the website with either Firefox or Internet Explorer 7.

I phoned the provider hosting the website on one occasion and blamed it for the site not being available. I couldn't access it using my notebook or two desktops. It was only when my friend successfully accessed the site when I couldn't that I realised it was down to my internet connection. I found the cure was to reset the ADSL modem router.

For some reason, using the FTP application to upload files sometimes (but not always) blocks access just to that site using a browser. I have a Belkin ADSL Modem with Wireless G Router. How do I prevent it from happening?

Gareth Williams, magazines@garethandmary.co.uk

A The File Transfer Protocol (FTP) and web (HTTP) connections should be totally unrelated, and a problem with one protocol should not affect the other. Since

it seems to block only that site, and resetting the router cures the problem, it appears that your router's firewall is blocking that site's IP address. The only reason we can think of for this to happen is to do with the difference between active and passive FTP file transfers.

FTP causes problems for firewalls because it uses two TCP/IP port addresses, 20 and 21, while most web applications work on one port, 80. For example, when you download a webpage your browser sends a request to port 80 at the website, which replies with the requested data on the same port.

Firewalls are designed to expect that the computer they protect will start each connection. In fact, when you have a router with several computers on the network, the router would not know which computer to send the reply to unless it was in reply to an outgoing request.

ACTIVE INTEREST

FTP sends commands to port 20, but data is transferred using port 21. In the original implementation of FTP, now called Active FTP, the FTP client starts a connection to port 20 of the FTP server and, in that conversation, specifies the port number for the FTP server to send data to. This exact number varies, but it will always be higher than 1,023. The FTP server then opens a connection to the specified port on your

computer. A firewall does not understand that the FTP client requested this connection. All it sees is an attempt by a remote computer to open a connection to a high-numbered port on your computer, so it will block this request.

PASSIVE NATURE

To get round this problem, a revised version of FTP called passive FTP was developed. With passive FTP, the FTP client software requests passive mode and the FTP server replies with a message containing a port number. The FTP client running on your computer can then open the data connection to that port on the remote FTP server and the FTP server uses this connection to send back the data. Because the data connection is opened from your computer, your firewall is happy.

Most FTP clients allow you to specify that they should always use passive FTP. If you are behind a firewall, this is the setting to use. In fact, if you connect to an FTP site using a web browser such as Internet Explorer, it will always use passive mode. However, many dedicated FTP programs will try active FTP by default and then switch to passive FTP if that does not work. I am guessing that your ADSL modem-router has a firewall that blocks any IP address that it detects has sent an unsolicited connection attempt. For more information, visit <http://slacksite.com/other/ftp.html>. 